

Settling in Your New Cat or Kitten

PART ONE

This first page on Cat Care, gives advice and information about settling in your new cat or kitten. Our second page deals with your cat or kitten's Healthcare, including neutering. Please read both pages carefully.

A CAT IS FOR LIFE!

Please think carefully before you decide to get a kitten or cat. It is important that you fully understand and accept the responsibility that you are taking on. Do you feel confident that you can give him all the time and care that he will need for a possible 20 years?

Thousands of cats and kittens are handed over to rescue organisations every year, often because people are simply fed up with them. Unfortunately, many of these unwanted cats and kittens are destroyed because there are just not enough homes.

Please consider adopting your cat or kitten (or a pair) from an animal charity or rescue centre.

ARRIVAL DAY

Before you bring your new cat or kitten home, make sure that you have prepared either a room or a confined area, especially for him. Check that all the doors and windows are closed securely, fireplaces are covered and the area is quiet, warm and safe. Place a litter tray, a cosy bed (a cardboard box with a blanket is fine), some toys, food dish and water bowl in the room for him.

On arrival, take him to his 'safe place' and show him where everything is. Let him explore his new surroundings without feeling threatened. You can stay in the room but sit quietly. After a little while, put your hand out to him and call his name, letting him come to you. If he decides to hide, whether it be for a few hours or a few days, do not attempt to force him out. Just continue to visit his 'safe place' and gently gain his trust. Offering some tasty treats will help.

If there are children or other pets in the house, it is best not to introduce them until he has gained his confidence. With some gentle persuasion and patience, your new arrival will soon be purring and enjoying a fuss.

Kittens

A young kitten will need more supervision at the beginning, to make sure he doesn't come to any harm. Check loo seats are down and the doors of washing/tumble dry machines are closed.

Remember, he may have left his mother and siblings for the first time and he will be feeling insecure and frightened. He will need lots of fuss and attention, but only gentle handling. You can always place a hot water bottle (not too hot), under his blanket and

give him a soft toy to snuggle up to.

SETTLING IN

A new cat or kitten needs to feel safe and secure before he can begin to settle in to his new home. After a few days or possibly weeks, your cat or kitten will feel confident enough to explore the rest of his new home. However, you must wait at least 3 weeks before allowing him to venture outside.

A young kitten should wait longer, as he must have completed his primary course of vaccinations (an adult cat must also be fully vaccinated). Always accompany the newcomer on his first few outings as he explores his new environment. Make sure he is totally familiar with his territory before letting him out on his own. (tip: let him out when he is hungry, so he will want to return home for his meal).

Any kitten under 6 months of age, should not be left outside alone. At this stage, they should be wearing a collar and identity tag.

KEEP HIM SAFE, KEEP HIM IN AT NIGHT!!

Children

Once you feel that your new cat or kitten has gained his confidence, you can gradually introduce other members of the family.

Excitable children must try to be calm and quiet around the new arrival. Young children must be supervised and shown the correct way to handle him. Make sure they understand that although he may enjoy being fussed and played with, he must also be allowed to sleep and seek privacy. At all times, children must be kind and gentle to their new family member.

Other pets

If you are introducing other pets to your new cat or kitten, please take it slowly, as it can sometimes take several weeks for them to get used to each other.

Where cats are involved, it is perfectly normal to expect a certain amount of hissing, spitting and growling (from both sides)! This may be followed by a swipe or full blown battle of claws! Never leave them alone together at this stage.

To avoid an aggressive confrontation and help ease introduction, follow these steps:

- Allow them to smell each other's scent through a closed door or on your clothes.
- Place their food bowls on each side of the door and feed them at the same time.
- Make an extra fuss of the resident cat.
- Begin to let the newcomer explore outside his room, while keeping the resident cat out of the way.
- Introduce them under supervision.
- Place their bowls at a reasonable distance and feed them together.

Stroke them both at feeding time, to make this a positive experience (extra for resident cat!)
Allow litter tray each at first.

When introducing dogs to cats, you can follow steps as above but when it comes to direct contact, you must have full control of your dog, making sure the cat or kitten has an escape route if necessary. Never leave the two alone until you are convinced that they have completely accepted each other.

EQUIPMENT

Carrier - a secure, covered wire or plastic pet carrier.

Litter tray - a good sized plastic litter tray, possibly with a clip on cover. Chose from wood, paper or clay based litter.

Collar - must have a proper quick release catch/elastic. Reflective ones available. Do not use on very young kittens. Make sure two fingers can slip underneath.

Identification - a metal engraved tag, bearing your phone number and your vet's phone number. Microchip as an optional extra precaution.

Bedding - either a comfy cat bed or simply a basket or box with a cushion or blanket. Regularly wash and treat for fleas.

Scratch post - very useful when attempting to protect your furniture and fun for sharpening claws.

Toys - balls with bells, pretend mice, feathers or balls on elastic, cotton reels, scrunched up silver foil, etc.

Cat flap - gives your cat the choice to go in and out at will. Must be lockable to keep your cat in and other cats out at night.

Food and water bowls - plastic, stainless steel or ceramic. (cats prefer not to drink water out of plastic).Clean bowls everyday.

GENERAL CARE

Feeding

When you take on a cat or kitten, try to find out what diet he is used to or what he prefers. A young kitten should be fed 4 times a day, with a specially formulated kitten food. This may come as 'wet' food in sachets and tins or in a dry complete form. Give him small amounts each time. If he is crying for more, then you can increase the amounts; he will not overfeed himself. By 3 months he can be fed 3 times a day and by 6 months you can wean him on adult food, fed twice a day. An adult cat will eat about 3/4 tin or 2 good handfuls of dry complete a day.

Water must be available at all times. Most cats and kittens cannot tolerate cows milk, so if you wish to give him a treat, offer him specially prepared cat milk.

Litter Training

Most cats and kittens will be fully litter trained by the time you acquire them. Kittens learn

this from their mothers.

Place the tray in a quiet, accessible place. Always remove 'mess' promptly and completely clean and wash the tray, at least every other day. More than one cat will mean more frequent cleaning. Never use bleach or disinfectant (unless specifically for animal use).

Once your cat or kitten has access to the outside, he may chose to do the majority of his business there. However, you should still provide a litter tray.

If your cat or kitten is not clean at first, then you must confine him to one room with his litter tray, until he learns to use it regularly. Make sure the tray is not placed too close to his bed or food. If your kitten or cat continues to mess, then there will be a reason, as they are very clean animals by nature. Either he is not well, the tray is dirty, or he is stressed about something. If this is the case, call us for advice.

Hygiene

Litter trays are often regarded as unhygienic and unnecessary. As long as you clean them regularly, wash your hands each time, worm and de-flea your cats, then they shouldn't pose any health threat. Where babies and young children are concerned, treat the tray the same as any other potential household danger, move from reach, supervise and say 'NO'.

Toxoplasmosis

All to often, cats become unwanted when their pregnant owners are wrongly advised about the potential threat of the parasite Toxoplasma; even though the risk of transmission is very unlikely and easily avoided. In fact, unwashed vegetables and under-cooked meat pose more of a threat. Either someone else can clean the tray or simply wear protective gloves and wash your hands every time!